

VIOLIN CONCERTO in Em

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809 – 1847)

PERIOD: Romantic (19C.)

GENRE: Violin Concerto (1844)

DURATION: The three Movements in total = 22 Minutes

BACKGROUND:

Mendelssohn's works have a Classical period sound, reflecting his training in Classical forms in his youth. His works also reflect a strong Romantic impact. A good example would be the "Hebrides" Overture, a programmatic work inspired by the Scottish coast. When he was 17, he composed incidental music for Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream". This too is highly programmatic (at the very beginning, we can hear the fairies dancing)

Mendelssohn was a virtuoso pianist. His 4 Piano Concertos were showpieces composed for virtuosos of the time. They contain startling effects with the technical display and revealed much of Mendelssohn's personality.

VIOLIN CONCERTO in Em

The Violin Concerto also contains these qualities. The three movements are linked by thematic content and connecting passages: a transition leads from the opening Allegro molto appassionato to the lyrical Andante and an introduction to the last movement alludes to the first movement's opening theme.

Rather than opening with an orchestral exposition, the Violinist states the opening theme from the outset.



He also places the cadenza before rather than after the recapitulation.

Here is an example of Mendelssohn reworking traditional Sonata form. He is finding ways to reinterpret yet continue tradition.

The 2nd Movement is in Ternary form (ABA) and a "Romance" for the violin and orchestra. The melody is highly expressive and representative of the Romantic period.



The Finale Movement is a Sonata-Rondo and sounds like a Scherzo with the violin and orchestra sharing the melodic interest and taking us to a joyous end.



THE SCORE:

1. Here is the Violin part with the orchestra part reduced to a Piano score

<https://violinsheetmusic.org/files/download/classical/mendelssohn-violin-concerto-op-64-score.pdf>

2. Here is the full score of Violin (solo) and Orchestra

[https://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto%2C_Op.64_\(Mendelssohn%2C_Felix\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto%2C_Op.64_(Mendelssohn%2C_Felix))

3. The 2nd Movement also appears in the Roger Fiske Blue Score Reading text books (page 79) which exist in many Music store rooms

PERFORMANCES:

I asked NECOM Violinist, Eliza Scott if she had played the Mendelssohn and for her to write about this experience. Here are her words:

I've played the Mendelssohn. I was lucky enough to perform it with the ASO a few years ago at Saint Mary's. It was a great honour!

For me, learning the Mendelssohn was a pinnacle moment in my learning - as you know it is the final piece played at a Suzuki graduation ceremony.

From the immediate soaring melody in the first movement, to the sonorous, introspective, passionate melody in the second, to the cheeky, unbridled, joyous third movement - it allows the soloist to show the audience everything they've got. And yet, magically, there is no break between the movements - the whole concerto seamless transitions from one movement to the next (a major plus for the soloist - there's no opportunity to any member of the audience to clap at the wrong time!)

It is a beautiful concerto, one which any violinist looks forward to adding to their repertoire!

Many Youtube performances exist. Here are some:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzbC39utkTw>

Hilary Hahn playing with an orchestra and the thematic part of the score is included

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l03Hs6dwj7E>

Australian violinist Ray Chen giving a brilliant performance here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PC6cPairOTA>

Itzhak Perlman playing with his ringing/ singing sound

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K67o86CS5uo>

Anne-Sophie Mutter in a beautiful blue dress playing superbly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVOdX-brMa0>

to inspire your students, here is an 11 year old playing the work with an orchestra

STUDENT RESEARCH: (ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS)

The following questions will require you to look at the score.

1st Movement:

1. Look at the Conductors score and list the instruments Mendelssohn has used.

https://ks4.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/b/bd/IMSLP228816-PMLP04931-Mendelssohn_Violin_Concerto,_Op._64.pdf

2. Is this a Romantic selection? Explain your answer.

3. What is the “actual” pitch for the opening two notes from the Clarinets?

4. Identify the three dominating harmonies in the opening 24 Bars.

5. Which instruments are “marking the harmony” in the opening bars? How are they doing this?

6. What happens at Figure B? What is the soloist doing at this point?

7. Which two instruments share part of the theme at Figure C?

8. Also at Fig.C many of the Strings are playing minims with a line through the stem. What does this mean?

9. Which instrument is playing a “Drone” at Figure E?

10. What is the section at Bar 209 known as?

2nd Movement:

What is the tonic key?

Here is a list of Compositional devices. Find where Mendelssohn has used them in the score:

a) The cantabile melody played by the violin is very Romantic. Name two compositional devices Mendelssohn draws on to elicit this expressiveness?

b) Describe the role of the Wind and Brass up to Bar 50

c) What Key is featured in the Middle section from Bar 51?

d) What is the compositional device he uses in Bar 58 and 59?

e) What happens at Bar 79?

3rd Movement:

1. Listen as the opening theme is played 6 times and then write it onto the staff

2. Please note...this theme follows the shape and pattern of many famous themes eg the opening of Eine Kleine Nachtmusik of Mozart does as well. The theme falls into the following sections:

STATEMENT....RESPONSE....RESOLUTION

3. What is the tonic key and identify the chord sitting under the first pause sign.

4. What is the Key at Bar 16? Why has he done this?

5. What happens at Bar 23?

6. What are some of the challenges for the soloist and the orchestral players when performing this Movement?

7. What happens at the Tutti in Bar 70?
8. And what happens at Bar 116?
9. At Bars 230-233 Mendelssohn is looking to build the excitement of the impending ending. How does he do that in these bars?
10. The soloist has to accompany the orchestra in many sections. Quote Bars where this happens.

A CONCERT.....

I look forward to seeing everyone on Tuesday 20th April at 7.30pm in the NECOM Auditorium in the Old Teachers College. Here you will hear a live performance from Richard and one of the World's finest Chamber Orchestras, the ACO! The other work they are playing is the Serenade for Strings - Tchaikovsky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2ZU-1EyVOW>

For tickets phone NECOM 0267882135

AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA (ACO)

SOLOIST: Richard Tognetti

